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INTRODUCTION.

AMONG all the varied productions with which Nature has adorned the surface of the earth, none awakens our sympathies, or interests our imagination, so powerfully as those venerable trees which seem to have stood the lapse of ages, silent witnesses of the successive generations of man, to whose destiny they bear so touching a resemblance, alike in their budding, their prime, and their decay.

Hence, in all ages, the earliest dawn of civilization has been marked by a reverence of woods and groves: devotion has fled to their recesses, for the performance of her most solemn rites; princes have chosen the embowering shade of some wide-spreading tree, under which to receive the deputations of the neighbouring "great ones of the earth;" and angels themselves, it is recorded, have not disdained to deliver their celestial messages beneath the same verdant canopy. To sit under the shadow of his own fig-tree, and drink of the fruit of his own vine, is the reward promised, in Holy Writ, to the righteous man; and the gratification arising from the sight of a favourite and long-remembered tree, is one enjoyed in common by the nobleman, who is reminded, as its branches wave over his head, whilst wandering in his hereditary domains, of the illustrious ancestors by whom it may have been planted; and the peasant, who, passing it in his way to his daily labours, recalls, as he looks on it, the sports of his infancy round its venerable trunk, and regards it at once as his chronicle and land-mark.

To preserve the characteristics, and perpetuate the remembrance of some of the most striking of these objects, in themselves so interesting, is the design of the *SYLVA BRITANNICA*: in the descriptions, therefore, which accompany the plates, it will be found, that although the minutiae of botanical definitions are omitted, as unnecessary, and even misplaced, in a work of so general a nature, every circumstance of local connexion, or traditional interest, has been carefully attended to; and gratified, indeed, will the author be, should his performance inspire in the minds of those who may favour it with their attention, even a small portion of the pleasure which he has himself experienced, whilst haunting the woods and forests, intent on delineating those varieties and peculiarities of their noblest productions, which he has endeavoured to transfer to the following representations, with as much of the spirit of Nature as he could command, and with all the truth, which minute remark, and faithful imitation may, he hopes, lay claim to, without hazarding the imputation of undue presumption.